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ABSTRACT

A survey of the status of language usage in Zimbabwe begins with an overview of the use patterns of English, Shona, and Ndebele, focusing on communication between ethnic and language groups, the decline in native English speakers and increase in English usage, political issues, educational requirements for languages, illiteracy, and the media. A matrix follows that rates all of these languages on: (1) their usage rating using State Department classifications; (2) increase and decrease trends by the year 2000; (3) chief of state use in addressing the populace; (4) use in armed forces, government, court, and diplomatic communications, written and oral; (5) use as a language of instruction or required language in higher education, on the secondary and elementary levels, and in adult education; (6) use in the popular press, radio and television broadcasting, and film; (7) business and professional use, written and oral; (8) use in intellectual circles; (9) the alphabet situation; (10) their status in literature; (11) use in public signs and notices; and (12) the availability of instructional materials and dictionaries for use by English speakers. Explanatory notes give the number and population percentages using the languages, the type of alphabets used, and specific instructional material titles. A selected bibliography is also included. (MSE)

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Language/Area Reference Center

COUNTRY STATUS REPORT:

ZIMBABWE

September 1984

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Zimbabwe - 1, Overview

English is the official language of Zimbabwe. It is spoken natively by about two percent of the population, largely the European sector and is the official second language of the African population. The primary African languages in Zimbabwe are Shona and Ndebele. Shona speakers make up perhaps seventy-five percent or more of the population and Ndebele speakers about sixteen percent. The remaining eight percent or so of the population consists of speakers of a variety of other indigenous languages, none of which has more than about 250,000 speakers.

English is usually the language of communication between black and white Zimbabweans. It may also be used between Shona and Ndebele speakers. A pidgin compounded of the indigenous languages, English and Afrikaans, called Fanagalo, also referred to pejoratively as "Kitchen Kaffir", is also used for communication between the so-called European and African Zimbabweans, but its use is declining and it is rarely used by the present generation of Zimbabweans. In the preindependence era, the term European was officially applied to whites regardless of their place of birth. The government no longer officially distinguishes people in race or ethnic terms.

The percentage of the population which speaks English natively has declined since independence from Britain in 1980 with the heavy emigration of whites from Zimbabwe. Despite this decrease in native speakers, there has been an increase in the amount of English spoken, due largely to the increase in education for the Blacks, increasing cosmopolitanism and the high prestige of English. The number of speakers of the indigenous languages has increased with the decrease in native English speakers. Shona is unofficially the language of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the ruling party in Zimbabwe, the members of which were more than seventy percent Shona during the struggle for independence.

English is the language of business, politics, education, broadcasting, the press and the military. Increasingly, however, Shona and Ndebele, particularly Shona, are being used in many of these situations. Shona and Ndebele may be used in the Senate of the parliament although English is used primarily. Both languages schools. along with English, as a language of instruction in the primary schools. Shona is taught as a second language in schools at the primary and secondary levels and there has been some discussion about making Shona a compulsory subject. Any African language taught as a second language though is always in addition to English. The incidence of Shona and Ndebele and their use as a first language reflect the locations of groups of native speakers.

English is a compulsory subject in schools from grade one through the secondary level. Ability in mathematics, English and an African language are requirements for entry into secondary school. English is the medium of instruction at the university. Students entering the university must demonstrate competence in English or they must attend remedial courses. English is a compulsory subject only in certain study programs, such as teacher training.

There has been almost no officially sponsored provision of adult education outside of the university, although this is changing. Private voluntary organizations, sometimes in collaboration with a university institute, have provided the bulk of adult education and literacy training. Widespread illiteracy remains a major problem, particularly in the rural areas where over eighty percent of the African population resides. Habitants of these areas are likely to know only a very limited amount of English as well. Recruits into the army are required to take English lessons when they join their unit. Competence in English is a requirement for acceptance into the police force.

After independence in 1980, the government moved to assumed control of the media. Until 1981, the country's five major newspapers were owned by South African commercial interests. The white editors of the two papers in Harare were replaced by Africans and stories and news on African interests were expanded. Radio has been the most influential means of mass communication with broadcasting in English and the vernaculars. Until independence, television served the white community almost exclusively. Both radio and television rely heavily on official versions of events.

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Zimbabwe - 2, Use Matrix

ZIMBABWE

Languages

Factoids	English	Shona	Ndebele
1. Usage rating*	2	3	3
2. Increase/decrease	3	1	1
3. Chief of State use?	1	1	0
4. Armed Forces/written	1	0	0
5. Armed Forces/oral	1	3	3
6. Government/written	1	0	0
7. Government/oral, national	2	2	2
8. Government/oral, local	1	3	3
9. Court/written	1	0	0
10. Court/oral	1	3	3
11. Diplomatic use?	1	0	0
12. Higher education	1	0	0
13. Higher ed: required?	0	0	0
14. Secondary education	1	0	0
15. Secondary: required?	1	0	0
16. Primary education	1	1	1
17. Primary: required?	1	1	1
18. Adult education	4	4	4
19. Popular press use	1	3	3
20. Transmission across borders?	1	0	0
21. Use in radio broadcasting	1	1	1
22. Use in TV broadcasting	1	1	1
23. Use in film	1	1	1
24. Business/professional/written	1	0	0
25. Business/professional/oral	1	3	3
26. Use in intellectual circles	1	0	0
27. Alphabet situation*	1	1	2
28. Status of literature	1	1	2
29. Use in signs?	1	1	1
30. Teaching materials*	-	2	2
31. Bilingual dictionaries*	-	2	2

Notes:

Matrix figures are explained on following pages

? = information unavailable within time frame of project

- = not applicable

* = footnotes on following pages

FOOTNOTES

1. 1984 ESTIMATES, NUMBERS OF NATIVE SPEAKERS

Language	Number of native speakers	Percentage of population
English	210,000	2.0
Shona	7,875,000	75.0
Ndebele	1,680,000	16.0

27. TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

Language	Alphabet
English	Roman
Shona	Modified Roman
Ndebele	Modified Roman

30. TEACHING MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Shona	Fivaz, Derek and Jeanette Ratzlaff (comp.). Shona language lessons. Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe: Word of Life Publications, 1972.
	Stevick, Earl W. (ed.) Shona Basic Course. Washington, DC: Department of State Foreign Service Institute, 1980.
Ndebele	Pelling, James N. and Pamela Pelling. Lessons in Ndebele. Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe: Longman Rhodesia in association with the Rhodesian Literature Bureau, 1974.

31. DICTIONARIES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Text
Shona	Dale, Desmond. Duramazni: A Basic English-Shona Dictionary. Gwelo, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1981.
	Hanman, M. (comp.) Standard Shona Dictionary. Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe: Rhodesia Literature Bureau, 1974.
Ndebele	Pelling, James N. (comp.) A Practical Ndebele Dictionary. Salisbury (Harare), Zimbabwe: Longman, 1971.

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - a

1. Usage rating, using the State Department classifications
   1: Official language, most widely used.
   2: Official language, not most widely used.
   3: Widely used language, but not official. (Over 10% of population)
   4: Unofficial language used by significant minority (but less than 3)
   5: Unofficial language used by influential minority
   FOOTNOTE: NUMBERS OF SPEAKERS, PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

2. Increase/decrease trends by the year 2000
   1: Number of native speakers will increase in proportion
   2: Number of native speakers will remain proportionally constant
   3: Number of native speakers will decrease in proportion

3. Chief of State use, in addressing populace: YES (1) NO (0)

4. Armed Forces written communications
   1: Only language used in official communiques
   2: One of the languages used in official communiques
   0: Not used in official communiques

5. Armed Forces oral communications
   1: Used on all levels
   2: Used among officers only
   3: Used among multi-lingual NCO's and troops
   4: Used among monolingual troops only
   0: Not used

6. Written government communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used in official communications

7. Oral government communications/national level
   1: Official language spoken in national assembly
   2: One of the official languages spoken in national assembly
   0: Not used in government

8. Oral government communications/local level
   1: Official language in local government
   2: One of the official languages used in local government
   3: Allowed in local government proceedings, translated into official language
   0: Not used in local government

9. Court use in written communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - b

10. Court use in oral communications
    1: Only official language used in court
    2: One of the official languages used in court
    3: Allowed in courts, translated into official language(s)
    0: Not used in courts

11. Diplomatic use in notes to other countries: YES (1) NO (0)

12. Use in higher education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used

13. Language taught as subject in required courses in higher education:
    YES (1) NO (0)

14. Use in secondary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

15. Language taught as subject in required courses on secondary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

16. Use in primary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

17. Language taught as subject in required courses on primary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

18. Language use in adult education
    1: Used in oral and written technical instruction
    2: Used in oral and written life skills instruction
    3: Used in oral life skills instruction
    4: Used in literacy classes only
    0: Not used in adult informal education

19. Language use in popular press
    1: Used in publications throughout country
    2: Used in centrally-based publications with national distribution
    3: Used only in regional and local publications
    4: Used in clandestine publications only
    0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - c

20. Language used in radio/TV transmission across national borders?
YES (1) NO (0)

21. Language use in radio broadcasting
1: Language used broadcasting thoughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national broadcasts
3: Language used in local broadcasting only
3: Language used in clandestine broadcasting only
0: Language not used in radio broadcasting

22. Language use in TV broadcasting
1: Language used in telecasting throughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national telecasting
3: Language used regional and local telecasting only
0: Language not used in TV

23. Language use in film
1: Language used in indigenous film-making
2: Foreign-language films dubbed/subtitled into language
0: Language not used in films

24. Business/Professional use - written
1: Sole official language in business and professional communications
2: One of the official languages in business and professional communication
0: Not used

25. Business/Professional use - oral
1: Used in trade and commerce throughout country
2: Used in national trade and commerce only
3: Used only in local trade and commerce

26. Language use in intellectual circles
1: Language used in indigenous scholarly publications
2: Language used in formal scholarly discussion
0: Language not used

27. Alphabet situation
1: Established standardized alphabet exists.
2: Alphabet developed, no standardization
3: Competing alphabets exist
0: No alphabet exists
FOOTNOTE: TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

28. Status of indigenous literature
1: Established written tradition exists
2: Literature tradition emerging
3: Popular literature exists
0: No written literature exists

29. Language used in official public signs, notices: YES (1) NO (0)

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - d

30. Teaching materials for English speakers
    1: Wide range of teaching materials exists
    2: Narrow range of teaching materials exists
    0: No teaching materials exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

31. Dictionaries for English speakers
    1: Wide range of bilingual dictionaries exists
    2: Narrow range of dictionaries exists
    0: No dictionaries exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY